LECTURE FIVE: IMAGE TECHNOLOGIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF MASS SOCIETY

Introduction
One of the most significant changes that occurred at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, was the emergence of mass society (slide). Some of the elements that contributed to this development include (slide):

- The use of electricity in creating a ‘wired world’ – a topic that we have discussed in some detail in our previous lecture;
- These changes in telecommunications not only affected the way news was presented, it also significantly altered the content. “Ways of reading also changed” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164), along with the structure of the reading public itself;
- “These developments were paralleled and influenced by a century-long transition to a predominantly industrial economy” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164), resulting in the increased urbanization of society;
- During this time, communications was not the only area where significant changes were occurring – transportation, for example, was also rapidly evolving with the emergence of the bicycle, the automobile, and the airplane;
- “The sense of space they fostered, coupled with the increased speed of railway and steamship travel” is also thought by Crowley & Heyer (2003:164) to have “led to World Standard Time via the creation of time zones”.
- These developments in transportation also resulted in the construction of a number of public works including canals, bridges and tunnels, thus allowing the spread of urbanization to continue as workers were able to “live at increasing distances from their workplaces, thereby creating a commuter as well as consumer society” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164)

The first essay of this section, Sontag’s On Photography, focuses on the effects that the development of the photograph had in fostering within the culture (slide) a “new awareness of people, places and things” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164). Yet it was not the photograph perse that initiated this new visual ‘awareness’ within the culture, but rather (slide) “its wide circulation as a mass medium” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164).

In the next essay on Early Photojournalism, Keller discusses how the developments in one particular technique enabled this wide circulation of photographs to occur (slide) – lithography.
What is lithography *(slide)*? Lithography is a process by which engravings are made into a particular surface which can then be used to make impressions from. Originally these inscriptions were based on drawings, however enhancements in the technique eventually “enabled photographic reproductions to be used in newspapers, books and magazines” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164).

In this period of transition from the 18th to the 19th century, new patterns in consumerism and consumption began to emerge. This is the focus of the next essay in this section – Rosalynd Williams’ *Dream Worlds of Consumption*. In her discussion of the various World Fairs and Exhibitions *(slide)* that were occurring throughout Europe at this time, Williams determined that while there existed a period between 1850 and 1900 *(slide)* when society was absolutely fascinated by concepts of technological advancements and progress, it became evident at the Paris Exhibition in 1901 *(slide)* that this fascination was increasingly becoming “overshadowed by the possibilities of consumer goods” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164). In the process, this new world of consumer goods directly “challenged art and religion as focal points of human aspiration” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:164). This transition was underwritten by the construction of department stores *(slide)* which introduced an entirely new way of product consumption to a public with an increasing disposable income – the direct result of “an expanding industrial economy” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:165).

Not only was the Paris Exhibition an important site for the development of consumerism, it was also the place where the public were first exposed to the power of the motion pictures *(slide)*. It was between this time and the First World War that movies emerged as a mass medium *(slide)*. Czitrom examines “the cinematic experience further” in his essay, *Early Motion Pictures*, “by looking at the early history of movie theatres and their publics” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:165). The first movie theatres were small, temporary locations which rapidly spread throughout Europe and the United States, and it was here that “moviegoing as a collective public experience began” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:165). These makeshift theatres were replaced by larger, permanent, and infinitely more grand movie palaces in the 1920s. By this time, movies had become the entertainment of choice for all social classes, effectively resulting in the death of vaudeville *(slide)*. Initially the novelty of seeing moving images on-screen was sufficient enough to entertain audiences, however it wasn’t long before “certain genres of film and identifiable actors” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:165) came to be preferred. It was in this way that the star system was created.

This development is examined in further detail in the next essay, *Mass Media and the Star System*. Jib Fowles links the formation of the star system with *(slide)* “changing social patterns”
and the growth of an urbanized, middle-class population (slide) “who saw entertainment and sports personalities as the embodiment of their aspirations” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:165). This fascination with stars and their lives was a gradual process intricately connected with the advancement of telecommunication technology – it was only through the advent and subsequent improvement of the telegraph, print, photography and transportation that various film and sporting figures were able to gain enough media exposure to become well-known. Motion pictures escalated this process and it wasn’t long before (slide) “actors became recognizable personalities who were often associated with particular roles” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:165) and even particular attitudes. Mass society had now also become a celluloid society (slide).

In the final essay of this section, Advertising and the Idea of Mass Society, Jackson Lears examines what is considered to be “the major link between images and mass society – (slide) advertising” (Crowley & Heyer 2003:165). As early as 1900 (slide), advertisers had conceived of and were trying to implement the concept of a mass audience for their advertisements. One of the major instigators and motivators of this movement was P.T Barnum, famously quoted as saying (slide) – ‘There’s a sucker born every minute’, demonstrating his firm belief in the general naiveté of the consuming public. In the late 1920s, advertising had begun to be incorporated into radio, when various programmes began to credit their commercial sponsors. Eventually advertising made the transition from radio to television in the 1950s (slide).

**FOCUS: Sontag & On Photography**

Photographs seem to be instilled with realism. As Sontag (2003:166) states – “Photographed items do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it”. Whereas paintings and literature are immediately recognizable as interpretations or representations of the physical world, photography on the other hand, seems to be generally perceived as a method of ‘capturing’ or ‘mirroring’ reality (slide). Yet this is most definitely not the case. Photography by its very nature is actually extremely aggressive (slide). In carefully calculating exactly how each photograph should be shot – angle, light diffusion, chosen subject, etc, “photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are” (Sontag 2003:167).

This aggression has remained a constant component of photography, even from its initial glory days in the 1840s and 1850s, right up to today. What has changed is the technology itself. The camera was originally an expensive, cumbersome apparatus which, as with most new gadgets, was mainly the play toy of the wealthy or the obsessive. At this time, photography was mainly a novelty with no clear purpose or use for society. (slide) “It was only with its industrialization that photography came into its own” (Sontag 2003:168) as an art form.
As the camera became more compact and affordable for the average person, photography began to be amalgamated into the very framework of our lives. It has now become a ‘social rite’, as Sontag (2003:168) states – in which special occasions, holidays and achievements are memorialised in a photograph. Yet Sontag (2003:168) raises another important point for consideration by arguing that as much as photography is a way of certifying that an event did indeed take place by providing visual evidence of it, it “is also a way of refusing it – by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image (slide), a souvenir”. It is in this way that photography can be seen to be more than just the end result of a photographer’s encounter with a specific event, the event is actually the process of taking the photograph itself, and all the decisive decisions that are made at that exact moment in time – “to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on” (Sontag 2003:169).

Yet the aggressive nature of photography seems to be at odds with the general clause of non-intervention (slide) that seems to permeate such areas of photography as photojournalism. While a photographer may actively participate in the way and the manner a shot is taken, to take a photograph is in essence to be a spectator, witnessing an event or a subject from the sidelines. Some of the most famous and powerful photographs ever taken have been of terrible and traumatic events when a photographer has made a conscious decision between standing by and recording the event or becoming directly involved. As Sontag (2003:170) states (slide) – “The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene”. However, often in such circumstances the technology is now in place for these photographs to be mass distributed amongst the general public, thus alerting the world to particular situations which require urgent global intervention. Consider the way the Vietnam War was interpreted by the public once photographs and film shots of the war were released. Could photography then be considered an example of passive aggressive intervention (slide)?

**FOCUS: Williams & Dream Worlds of Consumption**

The years between 1850 and 1900 saw England and Europe stage a number of different exhibitions and World Fairs. Beginning with the opening of the Crystal Palace in 1851 (slide), these events were designed to (slide) display and educate the public about the various inventions and “recent products of scientific knowledge and technical innovation that were revolutionizing daily life” (Williams 2003:179). The theme of the 1855 Exhibition was ‘Industry’, where numerous tools and machinery involved in production were featured. The public were also shown “sequential exhibits of products in various stages of manufacture” (Williams 2003:179). The
exposition in 1878 however moved away from industry as the main focus to instead celebrate such wondrous innovations of science and technology as photography and electricity.

The overriding theme governing these exhibitions was the (slide) celebration of humanity’s innovation and ingenuity. However, this focus was lost at the 1900 exposition in Paris, where (slide) “the sensual pleasures of consumption clearly triumphed over the abstract intellectual enjoyment of contemplating the progress of knowledge” (Williams 2003:180). For the first time at these types of events, advertising had become part of the display. As such, the emphasis of the exhibit instead shifted towards selling. No longer were these inventions merely displayed as wonderments of new technology for the sole purpose of fascinating and educating the general populace. Rather, they had instead become mere commodities available for sale to the highest bidder.

In actual fact, the 1900 exposition could be seen to be (slide) a microcosm of France itself at a particular revolutionary time in history when changing patterns of consumerism were symbolic of a culture attempting to break ties with its 19th century past to instead embrace the future in the 20th century. In other words, “the exposition of 1900 provides a scale model of the consumer revolution” (slide) (Williams 2003:181). One of the most significant changes apparent at the exhibition was not only the emphasis on merchandising but also the manner in which these products were merchandised – “by appealing [directly] to the fantasies of the consumer” (Williams 2003:181). Perhaps for the first time consumers were being actively seduced on a large scale by product manufacturers who (slide) deliberately set about manipulating people’s dreams and fantasies to more effectively sell their goods. It is from this concept where the title for this essay – Dream Worlds of Consumption, came from.

It was also during this period that the first department stores began to emerge in Paris (slide). According to Williams (2003:182) – “The emergence of these stores in late nineteenth-century France depended on the same growth of prosperity and transformation of merchandising techniques that lay behind the international expositions”. The success of these stores was not just a result of their greater range and generally lower prices, rather “the department store introduced (slide) an entirely new set of social interactions to shopping” (Williams 2003:182). Before this time, shopping involved negotiating directly with the merchant for a price on a particular product. Once the prince was agreed upon, the shopper was basically committed to making a purchase. On the other hand, in the department store shoppers gave up this ability to interact directly with the seller in fixing a price for a product, for the opportunity to browse amongst a wide range of products with absolutely no obligation to purchase anything. It was this element in particular
which was responsible for the (slide) transformation of shopping from necessity to pleasure and entertainment.

The design of the department store encouraged this transformation, with spectacular window displays enhanced by electricity (slide). According to Williams (2003:183), it was this technology which “made possible the material realization of fantasies which had hitherto existed only in the realm of imagination”. As a result, window shopping became genuine form of entertainment. Electricity change the entire face of Paris – night time gloom was alleviated by the glow of streetlights, fountains were illuminated to entrance the passing crowd and every night in 1889, the Eiffel Tower was awash in spectacular coloured lights. This was all conducive in nurturing “a collective sense of life in a dream world” (Williams 2003:184) that enchanted the general public and made the ‘dream world of consumption’ a reality.

**Australian Perspective: Film**

Cinema (slide) has always been of “great significance in Australian culture” (Moran & Vieth). In fact, so great was Australia’s preference for film that the weekly cost of going to the pictures was taken into consideration when determining the rate for the basic wage. Between the years 1906 and 1911 (slide), Australia was actually the largest producer of films in the world – including *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906) which is “arguably the world’s first feature film” (Moran & Vieth). However, after this golden age of filmmaking, the Australian film industry suffered a series devastating set-backs. Concern for profit led to the rationalization of the film industry which saw “various small production houses and theatres [amalgamate] to form a vertically integrated company called (slide) Australasian Films and Union Theatres” (Moran & Vieth). This company virtually ceased local film film production in order to concentrate more on the “distribution and exhibition of overseas films” (Moran & Vieth) – particularly American productions. This decision virtually destroyed the Australian film industry.

Although the film industry was somewhat revived following the First World War, the subsequent arrival of the ‘Talkies’ in the 1920s (slide) “required sophisticated and expensive recording equipment, [which made]…the production of local films even more expensive and financially risky” (Moran & Vieth). Despite renewed interest by the Australian government in the period between World Wars, it was not until the Australian Revival in the 1970s (slide) that local film production once again began to become profitable. In particular, the 1990s saw a string of films – including *Muriel’s Wedding, Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* and *The Piano*, achieve international acclaim and overseas distribution interest.